

The INQUIRER

70p

www.inquirer.org.uk

oving
ur
alls

PROCESSEL

MAY 05 2009

GTU LIBRARY

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

Articles express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

Subscribe by writing to
Inquirer Subscriptions, Essex Hall
1-6 Essex Street
London WC2R 3HY

Annual subscriptions are £25.

Cheques payable to The Inquirer.

Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £70 plus VAT. Deadlines are available from the editor.

Births, marriages and deaths are 50p a word plus VAT.

Editor M Colleen Burns

46A Newmarket Road

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Jennifer Eaton

Cover photo 'Storm King Wall',
EB Morse, licenced under Creative
Commons

Find out more about the Unitarian
and Free Christian movement. Log
on to www.unitarian.org.uk or email
info@unitarian.org.uk

Write to

The General Assembly
Essex Hall
1-6 Essex Street
London WC2R 3HY
ph: 0207 2402384

Anniversary service full of splendid hope

By Bill Darlison

While walking into the Molloy Hall to the General Assembly Anniversary Service, I felt a pang of nostalgia for those days not too long ago when buses would come and ferry us a few hundred yards to Chester Cathedral. I mentally contrasted the cool stone beauty of the Anglican cathedral in which voices are naturally lowered, with the cloying heat and casual conversation of the lecture theatre, scene – just a few hours before – of our business meetings.

But I was pleasantly surprised. As we took our seats, we could see the image of a dry stone wall projected onto the screen above the stage – easy to do in a lecture hall, much more difficult in a church – an image which announced and supported the theme of the whole service.

There was also something about the dress of the Rev John Harley, who led the service, and the Rev Margaret Kirk, who preached – no dog collars, no gowns, no stoles even – which demanded a more modern setting, and so, after a spirited rendition of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Hymn, we forgot that we were sitting in the very place that had witnessed the morning's distracted paper-rustling and earnest voting, and entered into worship.

The first hymn was one of the few concessions to tradition. The readings – a poem and a recent newspaper article; a prayer written by Andrew Pakula; Rumi's story of the Mouse and the Frog, delightfully acted by the children with painted faces; Lesley McKeown's version of the Prayer of Jesus; two hymns from the new hymnbook; sublime music from Adrienne Wilson (clarinet) and Myrna Michell (piano), added to the service's contemporary feel.

The theme was 'The Challenge of Connection', an exhortation to look at the barriers we build to keep each other out, and a plea for bridge building. In the children's piece, the frog and the mouse, who yearn to be in each other's company, are tied together at their feet – although in one version of the story this connection proves their downfall: a vulture seizes the mouse and the frog comes too! The first reading, Robert Frost's Mending Wall, contains the line 'Something there is that doesn't love a wall', which provided the haunting refrain to a quite brilliant meditation, written by Margaret Kirk, and accompanied by music composed by our own super-talented David Dawson and sung by 40 voices with such skill and conviction that it was difficult to believe that the choir had only been formed a day. This piece alone, as they say, was worth the entrance fee.

The second reading was part of a lecture given by the American novelist David Foster Wallace to the graduating class of Kenyon College Ohio, shortly before the author's death in 2005. (The whole speech is well worth reading and can be found on the Guardian website: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/sep/20/fiction>)

(Continued on next page)

With thanks

This colour issue of *The Inquirer* was paid for by Philip Overbury, an honorary life member of Meadow Chapel. There, he is regarded as someone with a profound commitment to peace, who thinks about others before himself.



Margaret Kirk

The challenge of connection

Margaret Kirk told the General Assembly that sometimes the pursuit of freedom stops us doing the hard work of really engaging with each other

Something there is that doesn't love a wall

— Robert Frost

Walls, beautiful walls – the cover photograph is an image of an Andy Goldsworthy sculpture at Storm King Park in New York. It reminds us that this famous contemporary artist spent a lot of his time in Yorkshire learning the skill of creating a dry stone wall.

The most famous Unitarian minister of the York chapel, Charles Wellbeloved made it his mission to save the Roman wall around the city which had fallen into ruin. And he worked tirelessly to raise money and organise public support so the city wall could be preserved for future generations.

Above all, he wanted people to be able to walk on them safely. And now they do. People come from all over the world to see York and walk on the Roman wall that a dissenting minister with the wonderful name of Wellbeloved, campaigned to save.

But if you make the journey from York to Whitby to the tiny Unitarian chapel hidden away down an alley, you'll find that its most famous minister – Francis Haydn Williams, spent an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to destroy walls – walls built, not for the protection of a city, but for the aggrandizement of an influential landowner. Walls, he argued, that encroached on common land that had existed for many years for all people to take pleasure in.

Even now as we're coming up to the anniversary of his death in 1910, there are Whitby people who will tell you stories that



Children in the Junior Programme told Rumi's story of the frog and the mouse. This photo and the page 2 portrait of Margaret Kirk by John Hewerdine

have been passed on to them about the legendary Francis Haydn Williams who objected so much to the enclosure of common land on the Abbey plains that he organised rallies and led marches and encouraged his supporters to break down the walls. And he went to prison for ignoring injunctions to cease his militant behaviour.

When his witnesses gave evidence at York Assizes in July 1903 some of them were quite elderly and spoke of their memories of being able to walk and play on the part that was now enclosed as a private garden – and of people and horses and carriages using the whole of it.

These stories didn't cut much ice with the jury. The lord of the manor and his family retained their right to enclosure.

Most people in Whitby haven't got a clue that Haydn Williams was a Unitarian. Most Unitarians don't know that he edited a hymn book entitled 'God – the Moral Ideal' – way ahead

(Continued on next page)

Bring people back into belonging

(Continued from previous page)

Wallace talks about the 'easy and automatic thinking' that is the 'default setting' of most of us most of the time, the unconscious belief that 'I am the centre of the world and that my immediate needs and feelings are what should determine the world's priorities'. He calls for 'attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, over and over.' These few words are a perfect summary of what growth in the spiritual life is all about.

The Rev Margaret Kirk explored these themes in her address. She told us about two of her ministerial predecessors, and their very different connection with walls: the Rev Charles Wellbeloved, minister in York during the 19th century, who campaigned for the restoration of York's historic city wall, and the Rev Francis Haydn Williams, minister in Whitby, who, in 1903 fought against the walls which were enclosing common land, and was hauled in front of the court for his pains. Both, however, would no doubt have supported the main thrust of Margaret's argument, which was that the supreme task of

religion is to 'bring people back into belonging', to help us dismantle those invisible barriers which we all erect to shut out the unfamiliar.

Midway through the service, very much in keeping with the theme of connection, we remembered our recently deceased ministers (Simon John Barlow, Elspeth Vallance, and Robin Williamson); thanked two ministers and a lay pastor who have just retired (Jane Barton, Margaret Kirk, and Roger Booth); and welcomed Stephen Lingwood and Raymond Seal to ministerial work.

The service ended with my favourite hymn, 'This is my song, O God of all the nations', and the Rev Anthony Howe (who had accompanied all the hymns on the piano) provided a piano postlude of such breathtaking exuberance that the congregation broke out into spontaneous applause. A fitting end to a splendid service which left me feeling, once again that, with such a plethora of talent and commitment in our midst, there is hope for us yet!

The Rev Bill Darlison is minister at Dublin.

Getting past the 'default setting'

(Continued from previous page)

of his time in terms of his theology.

But Whitby people know he was a troublemaker, or, depending upon your view, a defender of ordinary people's rights: fiery, difficult, passionate, driven and he took an axe to a wall that was constructed to keep ordinary people out and he incited others to do the same.

*'Building bridges between our divisions
I reach out to you, will you reach out to me,
With all of our voices, and all of our visions,
We could make such sweet harmony'*

Words, enhanced by the melody David Dawson composed: words written by the women of Greenham Common back in the 1980s. They are in our new purple hymn book.

And so are those other beautiful words of the poet Rumi:

*'Come, come, whoever you are, wanderer, worshipper,
lover of leaving, Ours is no caravan of despair, Come, yet
again, come.'*

When Rumi died in December 1273, we're told representatives of every major religion went to his funeral and he is reputed to have said – and this is in the midst of the crusades and violent sectarian conflict: 'I go into the Muslim mosque and the Jewish synagogue and the Christian church and I see one altar.'

The challenge of connection.

We pride ourselves a lot as a movement on the value of freedom. So hear some of the words of David Foster Wallace –

'The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day. That is real freedom. The alternative is unconsciousness, the default setting, the "rat race" – the constant gnawing sense of having had and lost some infinite thing.

In 2005 he addressed the graduating class at Kenyon College, Ohio. He told them the purpose of education was to teach 'how to keep you from going through your comfortable, prosperous, respectable, adult lives dead, unconscious, a slave to your ... natural default setting of being uniquely, completely, imperiously alone.'

The Daily Mail, Paul Dacre has said his inspiration as a journalist was the novelist EM Forster, whose guiding philosophy throughout all his writing was 'only connect'.

It's there in print – the epigraph 'Only connect' under the title of the novel that he was acclaimed for – 'Howard's End'. And every single one of EM Forster's novels is an exploration of the difficult, challenging, messy, almost impossible business of reaching out to other people, in human relations, in other cultures, other ideologies, understanding difference – not always managing too, but at least making the attempt. Every one has that underlying urgency.

In 'Howard's End' we have the words, spoken from the heart of the main character: 'Only connect! ... Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.'

I had a hard job trying to reconcile the philosophy of EM Forster with the editor of The Daily Mail and all I could think

'The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day. That is real freedom.'

– David Foster Wallace

was: if he was your inspiration, how did you go so badly wrong? How could an editor of a popular paper, with so much influence, go so badly wrong, if he really believed in the spirit of true connection?

And how could he not see the irony of citing Forster as his inspiration when his paper, again and again, vilifies those who come here in desperation, 'edged out of human belonging'. (Those are words of Inderjit Bhogal who gave the John Rely Beard lecture at the General Assembly meetings in 2005: 'Edged out of human belonging'.)

And is it possible that he could have forgotten those famous words of Forster's written at the outset of WWII: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friends I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."

'Only Connect'

There are some fine words in *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnal:

This is the mission of our faith:

To teach the fragile art of hospitality,

To revere both the critical mind and the generous heart,

To prove that diversity need not mean divisiveness,

And to witness to all that we must hold the whole world in our hands.

It isn't just David Foster Wallace who tells us that our 'default setting...will leave us with that gnawing sense that we have lost some infinite thing.' Jesus was saying pretty much the same thing.

The most compelling wisdom that Christianity offers us through the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth, is the gift of being human and the need to receive each other in the spirit of love. Not just because of some ethical code of righteousness, or something that will earn us rewards in a future life, but because, it is the most important kind of freedom that makes us human.

You can strip away a lot about Christianity, but you cannot strip away that radical message of 'only connect'. Bring people back 'into human belonging' – sit with them, eat with them, listen to them, touch them, receive gifts from them, be prepared to look them in the eye.

Or, if all that seems like a bit of a tall order, you may like to try doing what David Foster Wallace says is not intended as moral advice, or a way of behaving that you're expected to automatically be able to switch on, because it's hard and takes will and mental effort. But this is what he says:

'If you're aware enough to give yourself a choice, you can choose to look differently at the fat, dead-eyed, over-made up

and being free



Margaret Kirk accepts a rose in honour of her retirement from settled ministry while (l-r) John Harley, Joyce Ashworth and Ann Peart look on. Photo by John Hewerdine

lady who just screamed at her little child in the check out line – maybe she's not usually like this – maybe she's been up three straight nights holding the hand of her husband who's dying of bone cancer or maybe this very lady is the low wage clerk at the motor vehicles department who just yesterday helped your spouse.

'Maybe, maybe not ... it all depends on what you want to consider ... you may want to operate on your default setting ... but if you've really learned how to think, how to pay attention, then you will know you have other options.'

Freedom is immensely precious to our Unitarian spirit – the freedom to think for ourselves, the freedom to be ourselves, the freedom to question, the freedom to change our minds, the freedom to discover our own truth. Sometimes the pursuit of that freedom stops us from doing the hard work of really engaging with each other.

There's a little book that's been around for a while now called *The One Minute Mystic* with a passage in it that says:

Some people think they just need to know a bit more. Then everything will become clear, be explained, sorted.

And they'll be changed.

What a load of tosh. To "know" changes nothing. Hitler knew. Stalin knew. All the most evil people in the world knew stacks. They'd probably make a very good pub quiz team.

What does change people is when they stop exploiting others – and start contemplating them. Looking at people not as targets to hit, objects to exploit or problems to solve – but as mysteries to reflect on.

Wishing the best for them however hard it might be. Now, that's what I call change.

At the heart of who we are as a movement is the space for mind and spirit to flow freely, forever making new connections...and that is a challenge because it requires us to understand things differently.

Risky stuff, but then that is what it means to be alive. That is real freedom. And that is what we do, uniquely, at our very best, when we come together to celebrate, to affirm and honour our precious Unitarian diversity. From the very bottom of our hearts we wish the best for each other however hard it might be.

The Rev Margaret Kirk gave this address at the General Assembly meetings Anniversary Service

Meditation

Inspired by Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall*

We see barriers erected between people of different lands,
We see sheets of steel and towers of concrete called Protection.

We see boundaries policed,
watch men, women and children running from hunger and persecution,
looking for a gap in the wall ...

Something there is that doesn't love a wall

We see walls of fear –

Fear of the young, fear of the stranger,
Fear of sexuality that is different, fear of the educated, fear of the poor,
Fear of the Muslim, fear of the Jew –
Fear upon fear, endless and perpetuating,
And we offer our silent prayer that solid walls of fear will crumble to dust.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall ...

We hear the language of separation,
The jingoistic chant, the racial slur,
words of indifference and dismissal,
words arranged for the purpose of exclusion,
words that sting and taunt,
words that lie.

Let us find words that ring with love and truthfulness,
that reach out through the emptiness of separation.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall ...

We see the deluded barriers of the mind protecting self,

We see relationships stripped of affection as one person becomes closed to another.

We see people trapped in misunderstanding, old hurts re-ignited,
bricks placed higher on the wall,
goodwill and trust suspended.

And we ask for boundaries that are not impenetrable,
through which light can shine and distance be dissolved.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall ...

And when we need these boundaries for our own well being,

Let us know them for what they are,

Use them wisely and kindly,

Recognising our own vulnerability and that of others –

So each of us can find the space for retreat and succour,

find that peace that passes all understanding and be renewed with strength and love

for the task of living life joyfully in communion with all others. Amen

– Margaret Kirk

Ceremony honoured ministers

By Margaret Hamer

The opening service of the General Assembly Meetings is always alive with colour, movement and sound. This year's surpassed expectations as the music was provided by the Timperley Brass Band. Dressed in scarlet and black with golden light glancing off their instruments, the players played us enthusiastically through the hymns and musical interludes, their predominantly youthful energies adding optimism and zest to the proceedings.

The ministerial profession with its many accompanying responsibilities and satisfactions was the theme of the service. The Rev Lynne Readett told us of her personal transformation from a successful sales representative into someone who is finding deep satisfaction in a life of ministerial service. The Rev Cliff Reed focused on the spiritual aspects of ministry: the commitment to creating a worshipping community, the joys of shared inquiry and open-hearted fellowship, and the privilege of facilitating the spiritual discovery of others. The Rev Eric Jones, after 41 years in the pulpit and now enjoying life in the pews, spoke of the lifelong quest to find the best language to connect with people both within and beyond the boundaries of church membership. He stressed the crucial importance of good humour and common sense. Danny Crosby, a ministerial student, of warm sympathy and lusty singing voice, spoke with convincing sincerity of his conviction that effective ministry involved exploration and acceptance of the hidden recesses of the self before any authentic ministering could occur.

The tone deepened into one of reflective melancholy when portraits of past ministers were projected on to a screen, some eliciting murmurs of pleased recognition, others passing by in silence. – *"I had not thought that Death had undone so many!"* – Certainly these visual images made one aware of how conventions of ministerial representation have changed over the last century – and are still changing. Yet it would have been good to know the names of the individuals shown before they departed into silence for a second time.

Two women very much with us today and both noted for their long and distinguished work on behalf of Unitarianism, the Rev Celia Midgley and GA President, Joyce Ashworth,



The Rev Celia Midgley lit the General Assembly chalice to open the service which celebrated the work and lives of Unitarian ministers. The Timperley Brass Band played. Photos by John Hewerdine.

conducted this very diverse and stimulating service with their characteristic grace and dignity. Executive Committee member Lis Dyson-Jones read a passage from Ecclesiasticus. Interestingly, the choice of this reading sparked more controversy than some of the motions proposed in the business sessions. Its detractors claimed its values and world view were offensive to modern ears, while its defenders argued for its celebration of the diversity of talents and occupations that together make up a whole community. Two things are clear: Unitarians listen actively to services; and could, on occasion, express their views with greater temperance.

But if worship, even on grand occasions, does not allow for a little quiet laughter, it lacks something essential. And the brass band and banner parade added this essential ingredient. Banner-bearers fell into step like well-trained horses, presenting a proud cavalcade of colour and spectacle bound to raise the pulse of even the weariest onlooker. Wondrous devices communicated something of the rich diversity of our buildings, congregations and activities. It was little wonder that Andrew Mason, the background MC of this most exposed unrehearsed and exotic of Unitarian occasions, was caught moping his fevered brow when it all ended successfully. Question: How many Unitarians does it take to raise one banner? Answer: More than you think! There are times when the exploits of *Three Men in a Boat* come strongly to mind. The low doorways of the Chester Hall provided a final hurdle. How to exit with dignity? Some banner carriers achieved a miraculous telescopic effect and dropped three feet in height just in time. Others of the death-or-glory persuasion lowered their lances and charged out into invisible lists beyond, no doubt crying "Excelsior!" as they went.

In all, a fine and moving opening to what proved to be a highly successful GA.

Margaret Hamer is a member of the congregation at Bury St Edmunds



The annual banner parade.

All faiths, all people for peace

Excerpts from the Peace Vespers service at the GA meetings conducted by Feargus O'Connor.

In our fractured and violent world may we devote this time to reflecting on religious voices for peace. May we be inspired by their transforming message.

Unitarian voices for peace

William Ellery Channing in his 'First Discourse on War' said:

'Let us teach that the honour of a nation consists not in the forced submission of other states, but in equal laws and free institutions, in cultivated fields and prosperous cities; in the development of intellectual and moral power, in the diffusion of knowledge, in magnanimity and justice, in the virtues and blessings of peace.'

May all of us be inspired by Channing's role as an honoured Unitarian pioneer of the American peace movement. How I wish we could hear his eloquent voice today....

In comparison to war, Channing wrote, all other evils fade. He praised the spirit of true philanthropy and caring for the well-being of our neighbours. 'Religion was given to bind together, refine, soften human hearts. Its great ministry is that of love.'

One member of Channing's Boston congregation once complained: 'When Dr. Channing used to preach about God and the soul, about holiness and sin, we liked him... But now he is always insisting on some reform, talking about temperance or war. We wish he would preach the Gospel.'

In opposing war and violence Channing was acting from his deeply felt conviction of the innate dignity of all people, what he called in a famous sermon 'the divine capacity of human nature'.

'Is it only in dreams that beauty and loveliness have beamed on me from the human countenance, that I have heard tones of kindness, which have thrilled through my heart, that I have found sympathy in suffering and a sacred joy in friendship? I do not dream when I speak of the divine capacity of human nature. The germs of sublime virtue are scattered liberally on our Earth. Injured, trampled on and scorned as our nature is, I still turn to it with intense sympathy and strong hope.'

'I bless it for its kind affections, for its strong and tender love. I honour it for its struggles against oppression, for its growth and progress under the weight of so many chains and prejudices....'

'The divinity is stirring within the human breast and demanding a culture and a liberty worthy of the child of God... Let us hold fast to a faith in the greatness of the human soul, that faith which looks beneath the sweat of the labourer, beneath the rags and ignorance of the poor and discerns in the depths of the soul a divine principle, a ray of the Infinite Light, which may yet break forth and shine as the sun.'

A mother's voice for peace

Julia Ward Howe, another pioneer of the peace movement, of women's rights and the author of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. An excerpt from her *Mother's Day Proclamation*:

'Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We



Julia Ward Howe

women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.'

Jewish voices for peace

From Micah 4:3: They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation shall not lift sword against nation and neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall all sit under their own vines and fig trees. And no one shall make them afraid.

An Oasis of Peace

Fr Bruno Hussar, a Roman Catholic priest born in Egypt, had a vision: a vision that all the peoples of the Holy Land might live in true peace and amity. That noble vision led him to found the peace village of Neve Shalom-Wa-

hat al-Salam, an 'Oasis of Peace' inspired by the words of the prophet Isaiah. It was built on a barren hilltop near the Latrun Monastery half way between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem.

In Bruno's own words: 'We had in mind a small village composed of inhabitants from different communities in the country. Jews, Christians and Muslims would live there in peace, each faithful to his or her faith and traditions, while respecting those of others. Each would find in this diversity a source of personal enrichment.'

'The aim of the village: to be the setting for a school for peace. For years there have been academies in the various countries where the art of war has been taught. Inspired by the prophetic words 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more', we wanted to found a school for peace, for peace too is an art. It doesn't appear spontaneously: it has to be learned.'

'People would come here from all over the country to meet those from whom they were estranged, wanting to break down the barriers of fear, mistrust, ignorance, misunderstanding, preconceived ideas – all things that separate us – and to build bridges of trust, respect, mutual understanding and, if possible, friendship.'

Prayer for peace

Eternal Spirit, we pray for peace in the Middle East, for the people of Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan and wherever in the world war, strife and discord afflict and divide people.

We pray for a just peace everywhere, for the fair resolution of all grievances, disputes and wrongs and that just ordering of the world which alone opens the way to true reconciliation and lasting peace.

We pray for all victims of war, those maimed in body and spirit, their families and all who suffer pain, loss and sorrow caused by bloodshed and war.

We pray for the United Nations and its agencies, the Red Cross, Red Crescent and all international humanitarian bodies helping to build a just global order and laying down the foundations for enduring universal peace.

We pray for all peace makers and bridge builders who act and campaign for international peace. May they never lose heart and be ever mindful of the justice and rightness of their cause. Amen.

(Continued on next page)

Making peace with all creation

(Continued from previous page)

Isaiah's vision of universal peace

The wolf lives with the lamb.

The panther lies down with the kid.

Calf and lion cub feed together with a little boy to lead them.

The cow and the bear make friends.

Their young lie down together.

The lion eats straw like the ox.

The infant plays over the cobra's hole.

Into the viper's lair the young child puts his hand.

They do no hurt, no harm, on all my holy mountain.

Muslim voices for peace

Rumi said: O Thou, who art the kernel of existence, reconcile us all into love of each other and of Thee for all lamps are lit from the same light. Sa'di said: People who walk in the ways of God would not grieve the hearts of their enemies.

Hindu voices for peace

Hindu sage Swami Yogananda said: Let the ugliness of unkindness in others compel us to strive for beauty with loving kindness. May harsh speech from others remind us to use sweet and considerate words. If stones from evil minds are cast at us may we return only missiles of goodwill. As a jasmine vine sheds its flowers over the hands delivering axe blows at its roots, so to all who act with hostile intentions towards us may we shower the blossom of forgiveness. Amen.

Buddhist voices for peace

From Metta Sutta, the Buddha's words on kindness:

May all beings be happy and secure.

May their hearts be wholesome.

Let none deceive another or despise any person whatever...

In anger or ill will may we not wish any harm to anyone.

Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so may we cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.

Let thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world ... without any obstruction, any hatred, without enmity.

Universal peace: peace with all creation

Poetry by Elizabeth Doten

God of the granite and the rose,

Soul of the sparrow and the bee,

The mighty tide of being flows

Through countless channels all from thee.

It leaps to life in grass and flowers,

Through every grade of being runs,

Till from creation's radiant towers

Its glory flames in stars and suns.

God of the granite and the rose,

Soul of the sparrow and the bee,

Thy mighty tide of being flows

Through all thy creatures back to thee.

Thus round and round the circle runs

A mighty sea without a shore,

While men and angels, stars and suns

Unite to praise thee ever more.

A poet's prayer for forgiveness

By the Irish poet James Stephens

Little things that run and quail

And die in silence and despair.

Little things that fight and fail

And fall on sea and Earth and air:

All trapped and frightened little things,

The mouse, the cony, hear our prayer.

As we forgive those done to us,
The lamb, the linnet and the hare,

Forgive us all our trespasses,
Little creatures everywhere.

Ode to Joy by Friedrich Schiller:

We with arms embracing millions
Kiss this Earthly paradise.

Bless the stars in all their billions!

Bless the rhythm of our lives.

Friendship is our greatest treasure.

Joyfully its strains prolong.

Born of stars in pain and pleasure,

Friendship is the cosmic song.

Joined in courage, joined in passion,

In our friendship we grow strong.

Reach the broken with compassion.

Teach the truth against all wrong.

Swear it, as the stars all quiver

In the deep and dazzling skies.

Swear as the stars' lawgiver

Leads the chorus of our lives.

Benediction

By John Greenleaf Whittier, New England Quaker, abolitionist, humanitarian and peace campaigner:

Great God, unite our severing ways.

No separate altars may we raise

But with one tongue now speak thy praise.

With peace that comes of purity

Building the temple yet to be

To fold our broad humanity.

White flowers of love its walls shall climb.

Soft bells of peace shall ring its chime.

Its days shall all be holy time.

A sweeter song shall then be heard:

The music of the world's accord,

Rejoicing o'er the broken sword.

That song shall swell from shore to shore:

One hope, one faith, one love restore,

One brother-sisterhood for evermore. Amen.

Affirmation

International Peace Prayer based on one of the Upanishads, Hindu sacred scriptures:

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth.

Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust.

Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace.

Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our Universe.

Shanti, shalom, salaam, peace.

Amen.

The Rev Feargus O'Connor is minister at Golders Green.



G20 event: My word is my bond?

By Peter Hanley

We sat in awe under the dome of St Paul's Cathedral on 31 March. More than 2000 people crammed into this iconic building waiting for the unannounced visitors. Gordon Brown and Kevin Rudd prime ministers of the UK and Australia, hosted by the Bishop of London Richard Chartres as part of the St Paul's Institute series of events on Money, Integrity and Well-being.

Entitled 'My Word is my bond? Rebuilding Trust – the G20 and beyond,' the dialogue offered some theological reflection on the current global economic crisis. The downside of the economic situation was explained from Gordon Brown's and Kevin Rudd's perspectives. It was good to see and hear the warmth and appreciation the two men share. They had positive messages for the future.

PM Brown referred to an African word, 'Femba', meaning, 'there must be another way'. He asked us to imagine a different world, one where we have faith in the future instead of fear. Kevin Rudd posed the question in all our minds 'what then should be done?' He invited us to learn the lesson of 1933 which showed that when one nation acts to protect itself against the ills of another, then world community and global action are damaged.

Kevin Rudd said we needed to craft a future for all humankind, not just some. The Bishop of London seamlessly linked from one audience question to another.

One question gave an opportunity for some more key messages; 'Economic growth is not what UK and Australia need, but Gross Domestic Happiness'. Gordon Brown pointed to the importance of keeping to the budgets set for the Millennium Development Goals, when we debate the causes of crisis, and consider how we go beyond the aims of prosperity.

PM Rudd pointed us to the false god of our age, faith in mar-



The Bishop of London with Prime Ministers Gordon Brown and Kevin Rudd. Photo by Graham Lacdao / St Paul's Cathedral.

kets and happiness allegedly derived from wealth. He re-iterated a theme which had peppered the whole event; young people, saying 'young people are missionaries of hope'.

It was a very inspiring event thanks to the St Paul's Institute. Connections were made amongst the many religious people under that dome, which will hopefully create an energy and cohesion for a braver and newer world.

For more information see: www.number10.gov.uk/Page18858 or www.stpauls.co.uk/

Karen and Peter Hanley were invited to the event through the Faith and Public Issues Commission. They are members of Enfield and St Albans Fellowship.

Two PMs on the morality of crisis

Excerpts from speeches at St Paul's Institute event.

UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown

I want to suggest to all of you here today that this most modern of crises, the first financial crisis of the global age, has confirmed the enduring importance of the most timeless of truths: that our financial system must be founded on the very same values that are at the heart of the best of our family lives ...

There are four great challenges of this new global age which our generation must address urgently: financial and economic instability in a world of global capital flows; environmental degradation in a world of changing energy need; violent extremism in a world of mass communications and increased mobility; and extreme poverty in a world where there are still growing inequalities ...

Call it, as Adam Smith did, 'the moral sentiment'. Lincoln called it 'the better angels of our nature'. Winstanley called it 'the light in man'. Call it duty or simply call it conscience, it means we cannot and will not pass by on the other side when people are suffering and when we have it within our power to be both responsible and to support fairness, and endeavour to help ...

So, I believe that we have a responsibility to ensure that both markets and governments serve the public interest, to recog-

nise that the poor are our shared responsibility, and that wealth carries unique responsibilities too.

Australia Prime Minister Kevin Rudd

But open markets must be properly regulated, regulated with transparency, with impartiality and with fairness for all who would compete within those markets, not just for some. We must equally accept that markets may fail, and we must therefore provide for universal public goods; public goods such as universal health, universal education and a safety net for all; public goods by whatever means they may be delivered ...

But we must equally be reminded of John Wesley's great proclamation, 'The world is my parish.'

The world is my parish because beyond our shores and beyond that which we can readily see, the unfolding suffering from this crisis in the developing world is growing apace. For those of us in developed economies, this is the unseen cost of the crisis, the invisible face of the global recession, but in conscience and for people of conscience, we cannot stand idly by.

In the current economic crisis, the underlying truth is this. We are all in this together: governments and business, business and unions, individuals and communities, one nation with another.



Bury Unitarians support Parents' Group

The Bury St Edmunds Unitarian Congregation raised £400 over the past year and recently presented it to representatives of the Parents Support Group for the Special Care Baby Unit at West Suffolk Hospital.

The money was raised at a summer croquet match, the congregation's Christmas card scheme and collections at tea following services. The congregation also supported the Parent Group in August in their objections to the downgrading of the Baby Unit by the Regional Health Authority. Alan Coldwell who is a member of Bethnal Green and has been supporting and attending Bury St Edmunds for many years shows off the special teapot he made, which was used for collecting funds. Each year the Bury St Edmunds congregation adopts a local charity which it supports throughout the year. Photo by Martin Gienke

Goodbye Midland Union

Members of the Midland Union decided at their AGM on 21st March, at the Great Meeting House Unitarian Church, Coventry, to change the 'trading name' (in other words what we are known as) 'Midland Union' to 'Midland Unitarian Association', MUA for short.

Thirty-eight members from 13 of our 18 congregations, plus two visitors (Joyce Ashworth, then-president of the Unitarian General Assembly and Lis Dyson-Jones, MUA link member on the GA's Executive Committee) came together on a beautiful Spring day at Coventry's Great Meeting House Unitarian Church.

The business part of the meeting went very smoothly, and then we came to item 19 on the agenda, choosing a new name for the Midland Union of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches. After a spirited debate, we decided on Midland Unitarian Association.

Four names had been put forward for consideration: 'Midland Unitarians', 'Midland Unitarian Association', 'Association of Midland Unitarians' and 'Midland Unitarian District Association'. After a discussion, and an initial straw poll of

those present, the last two suggestions were dropped, and the meeting voted for one of the first two options.

The reasoning behind this was that our former short title 'Midland Union' gave no indication that we were Unitarians. Our full name 'Midland Union of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches' will remain the same for Charity Commission purposes, but we will henceforth be known as 'Midland Unitarian Association', which we think shows clearly both that we are a Unitarian organisation and that we are a District Association.

After a congenial lunch and a short service led by our new President, the Rev Peter Hewis, who took the life of famous conductor and Unitarian Sir Adrian Boult as his theme, we enjoyed a stimulating and interesting talk by the Rev John Harley, the General Assembly's Youth Coordinator. He was full of good ideas for involving children and young people in worship and other activities in our churches and chapels, and those present made good contributions too. John emphasised the need to have at least one adult present who has been CRB checked, and that it was better to have adults working in pairs. Keeping a log of activities was also recommended. He finished his talk by giving us some information about the GA's Chalice Award Scheme for children and young people.

We all went home with a lot to think about, and inspired to be more inclusive to our younger members and attenders.

— Sue Woolley



GA president visits Chorley

Joyce Ashworth, then-GA President, was the special guest at the Members' Monthly Meeting at Chorley Unitarian Chapel, on 1 April. The meeting was followed by tea, coffee and cake, and then the Chairman at Chorley, Ken Ratcliffe, presented the President with a 'Remembrance' rose bush.

Joyce then gave the members an interesting talk on her year as president, and what a busy year it has been!

Joyce told the meeting that she had conducted 36 Sunday services including 9 Anniversaries, a Covenant service to welcome new members, a Flower Service and a Holocaust Memorial service. She had also attended the service at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday, visited churches in South Africa and Transylvania, and attended the Canadian Annual Meetings.

The members are hoping that Joyce will be able to come back and talk to them again about her travels.

A 'Remembrance' rose bush was presented to the President by the Chorley Chairman Ken Ratcliffe. Photo by John Hewerdine.

Adelaide church celebrates 150th

By Peter Godfrey

Is this the first time a picture of a Unitarian place of worship and its history have featured on bottles of wine?

In 2008, Shady Grove, in the hills behind Adelaide, Australia, celebrated its 150th anniversary. This is a long time in modern Australian history. As well as selling many cases of excellent wine, produced specially to commemorate the anniversary, from vineyards close to the church, commemorative mugs were also sold. The church was originally a schoolroom for the children of early Unitarian settlers from Yorkshire.

The 150th anniversary events were well supported by members of the Unitarian church in Norwood, an Adelaide suburb 15 miles away. The two churches have been linked for many years. They share the same minister, the Rev Jo Lane, who ministered here in Britain at Richmond and Putney until 2006. Three times a year there are morning services at Shady Grove and the city church has no service that day. At other times Shady Grove services are held in the afternoon on the first Sunday of each month. Services are not held if the temperature is over 35c because of the risk of bush fires. Recently Jo has been helped at Shady Grove by Mr Rob MacPherson and there is great pleasure that Rob has been accepted for ministerial training in England from this coming September. Services are well supported and are often followed by a shared meal. There are regular work parties to care for the grounds – beautiful Australian ‘bush’ with wild orchids to be found at certain times of the year.

There is a graveyard amongst the trees at Shady Grove. As there is not one at Norwood the graveyard contains the remains or ashes of previous members of both churches. The most recent burial was that of John Dowie. John was one of Australia’s most famous artists and sculptors. His statues of the queen are in the national capital, Canberra, and in Brisbane, Queensland’s capital. Adelaide’s ‘landmark’ fountain symbolising the rivers of South Australia was sculpted by John as were several of the busts of the city’s most famous citizens that adorn the beautiful North Terrace. One of the most recent additions is that of John Dowie himself.

The Norwood church is full of life. On our recent visit there were over 50 people present at the services we attended in February and March. We were in Australia at the time of the awful



Some of the people at the meal after a service at the Norwood Church on a Sunday morning in March. In the foreground are Tom and June Marriott whom many people in England may know. Photo by Peter Godfrey

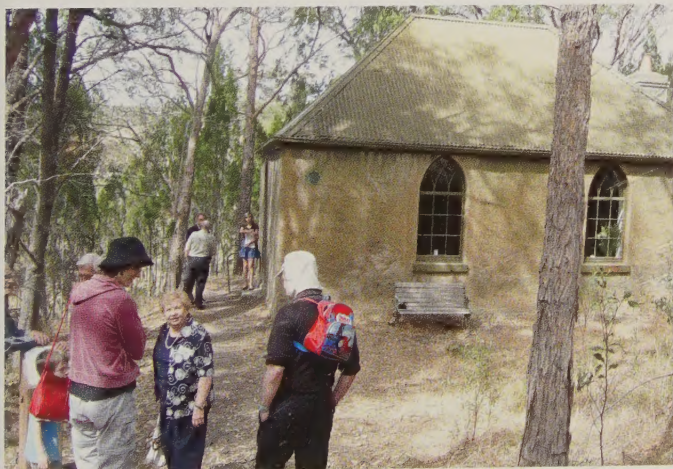
flooding in Queensland and the terrible fires in Victoria. One of Jo’s services centred on the care that strangers had shown to strangers throughout the tragedies – even gifts of caravans and cars.

Fund-raising activities for building developments are proving enjoyable and successful at the Norwood Church. One couple took people for evening cruises and a meal on their comfortable catamaran. There was a marvellous ‘Jazz Cabaret’ in the ballroom of a nearby town hall. One Sunday there was a post-service chicken lunch: chicken and roast potatoes came from a local shop; members with surnames from A to M brought salads and those with surnames from N to Z brought desserts. An excellent cook book has been produced. These and other events meant that the first year’s target of £5000 was raised in less than six months.

The church is certainly not inward looking. Every service sees the children during the first hymn pushing round a large basket on wheels in which members of the congregation put tinned foodstuff for people in need. ‘Write On’, a bi-monthly ‘journal’ produced by one member and supported by most others, has articles and jokes from serious to hilarious. It helps to raise money for good causes, one of which, the Ted Guild Village Bank of the Philippines, has just been sent £400. This ‘bank’ is a micro-credit organisation set up by American retired minister Polly Guild in memory of her husband to help Filipino Unitarian villagers obtain small loans to aid families and child education. Several Norwood Church members present a Sunday half-hour radio programme under the title ‘Expanding Horizons’ Whilst we were in Adelaide I spoke to a discussion group about ‘Faith and Freedom’ and taped one of the radio broadcasts on the same subject. The church has a branch of the Women’s League (to which my wife Sheila spoke and conveyed greetings from the British League), a Women’s Group, a craft and storytelling gathering, a Book Group, a film and theatre meeting, and there are book sales, ‘circle meals’ and walks in the bush.

It was a great pleasure to share the life of this lively Unitarian community for a few weeks.

The Rev Peter Godfrey is a retired Unitarian minister living in Stonehouse.



The Unitarian church at Shady Grove. Photo by Peter Godfrey



At ein gilydd, gyda'n gilydd

A very unique event called at ein gilydd gyda'n gilydd (coming together, working together) was held in the Aeron Valley in West Wales on 1 March to commemorate St David's Day, the Patron Saint of Wales. There are, in total, 18 chapels and churches of different denominations in the valley including three Unitarian chapels.

Following an initiative arranged by the Unitarian minister the Rev Cen Llwyd and two others, namely Euros Lewis and a local vicar the Rev Eileen Davies, a day of devotional activities were held at the local community theatre in Felinfach to celebrate the Patron Saint's day. This was a historical event as it is the first time ever that such an event where different religious establishments have joined together to such an extent within the area.

A workshop for children's activities and a series of Bible Studies and Poetry Readings were held. It finished with nearly every seat in the Theatre full for a Gathering Together to Celebrate the aspirations of St David. Taking part were the former Archdruid the Rev John Gwilym Jones, the Rev Enid Morgan and one of Wales's most well known folk singers Dafydd Iwan who is also the President of Plaid Cymru.

Translation equipment was available for those unable to follow through the medium of Welsh. The day's activities commenced with a banner procession into the theatre auditorium by representatives of the different congregations in the Aeron Valley followed by a screen presentation by Hywel Teifi Edwards.

It is envisaged that further activities will be held within the area enabling people from the different religious establishment to work together hopefully bolstering the religious activities in the area.

In the photo, Delyth Evans from Cribyn; Janet Evans from Ciliau Aeron; and Kay Davies, Nia Wright & Eurwen Williams from Rhydygwin carried banners as part of the opening ceremony.

— Cen Llwyd

Contacts on national matters

During the interim period, until a new chief executive is installed in Essex Hall headquarters, Information is available from the following people.

Peter Teets, Dot Hewerdine or Lis Dyson-Jones for congrega-

tion or district matters; Dawn Buckle for anything relating to Education and Training; The Rev Dr Ann Peart for Ministerial matters; The Rev Jeff Gould for Faith & Public Issues; Diane Bennett for Communications issues; Dot Hewerdine for DSC issues; The Rev John Harley for matters relating to the Youth; John Crosskey for finance; Difficult financial matters should be referred to Derek McAuley.

Sir Peter Soulsby, Dot Hewerdine, Dawn Buckle or Lis Dyson-Jones should be contacted for anything which is confidential to the Executive Committee.

Should your first contact be Essex Hall, then the staff will keep a log of your enquiry before directing you to the appropriate person. Contact details are available in the denominational directory.



(l-r) Jeff and Sue Teagle, Hazel and David Warhurst, Joan and Colin Partington Photo by John Hewerdine

Ruby Anniversaries at Great Hucklow

On Saturday 14 March at Great Hucklow in the Derbyshire Peak District, was the gathering place for a "Triple Ruby Wedding Anniversary" celebration. Three Unitarian couples, mutual friends who all married in 1969, had decided to mark their anniversaries by holding a Hucklow gathering. Joan and Colin Partington, Sue and Jeff Teagle and Hazel and David Warhurst invited friends to join them to celebrate 40 years of wedded bliss. All three couples were members of the Unitarian Young People's League. Most of us arrived in time for afternoon tea and afterwards we made our way to the Hibbert Room to view a slide show of images taken during the last 40 years. Neill Warhurst had put it together from a variety of sources and I was the only person in the selection of photographs who looked just the same after 40 years!

Later, we made our way down to the Peach Room for a Ceilidh where a huge folk band awaited us and kept the multitude entertained for the rest of the evening. Before we knew it, it was well past bedtime for contemporaries of the three couples, though many of the younger generations still had the energy left.

Sunday morning saw the Old Chapel filled with visitors to conclude our celebration with the Rev David Shaw and the local Hucklow Unitarians. In his distinctive way, David made his address relevant to all of those assembled. It was a truly memorable conclusion to our weekend of celebration.

— John Hewerdine